

In the mid 1990s, transplanting 1000 grafts in a day was a big deal.

The late Dr. David Seager was recognized as a pioneer in hair transplantation. He took the idea of all-follicular unit hair transplantation and gradually improved on it by transplanting more and more grafts, closer and closer together, until he could finish an area in one session. By the time I started working with Dr. Seager in late 1999 he was routinely transplanting 3000 follicular unit grafts in one day. For many men, this is the maximum safe number of grafts that can be transplanted in one day. I worked as Dr. Seager's only Associate until December 2005. For some men who had very dense hair and very flexible scalps and in whom hair transplantation was quite easy and quick to perform we transplanted as many as 4200 follicular unit grafts in one day.

Some hair transplant surgeons now transplant 4500 to 6000 grafts at a time. The obvious advantage for those who can afford to transplant this many grafts is that more bald scalp is covered at once. This means that there is one recovery period with less time off work and away from regular activities and possibly less travel than if the same number of grafts were moved in two separate sessions.

The number of grafts that can be transplanted in one day is determined by:

- the width of the strip that can safely be removed and sutured without tension
- the density of the donor hair in that strip
- the ease and speed of transplantation
- the tolerance of the patient for a long day
- and the patient's budget!

If the gap is too wide after a strip is removed and the skin is closed under tension it causes more scar cells (fibroblasts) to grow, causing the scar to be wider and thicker. Our goal is to create a narrow donor scar that can be easily hidden by the remaining hair.

A session of 4500 to 6000 grafts is only follicular unit hair transplantation if the natural bundles of hair are left intact. If all the 3-haired follicular units are split into three 1-haired grafts it will mean more grafts are transplanted but no more hair. Splitting the natural bundles causes a loss of fullness of the results and is not advantageous. The resulting, skinnier grafts are also more fragile and would not grow as well. To get large numbers of follicular units one has to have naturally dense donor hair and be able to remove a full length, wider than usual donor strip.

Transplanting 3000 grafts often takes 9 to 11 hours to complete. This is a comfortable day for patient, doctor, and staff. Transplanting 4500 or more grafts in one day could mean a session that starts at 7 am and ends at 1 am. This is an ordeal! Some doctors shave patients' heads then make all the holes first and place the grafts later to make hair transplantation faster. This unfortunately removes the patients' natural camouflage and lengthens the cosmetic recovery time. When we transplant any more than 4000 grafts we do so over 2 comfortable, consecutive days rather than in one arduous day. This adds one day to the recovery time but is much happier for patient and staff and allows us to avoid shaving heads. When transplanting grafts over 2 days, we also drop the premium charge that applies when more than 3100 grafts are transplanted per day.

Not everyone is able, interested in, or can afford to transplant 4500 to 6000 grafts at once but it is nice to have this option. It is especially nice for men who have already lost a lot of hair and would like to get as much hair back as soon as possible.